**14 Federal Bureaucracy**

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Addressing the problem of climate change caused by global warming is one of the foremost goals of the Obama administration.

**What We Learned**

***1. What is the structure of the executive branch?*** Congress and the president have created the agencies and departments that comprise the executive branch over the last 220 years. The cabinet departments, including the Department of State and the Department of Defense, are the major administrative units of the federal government that have responsibility for the conduct of a wide range of government operations. Congress and the president have created a number of independent executive agencies that are not part of any of the 15 cabinet-level departments, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Government corporations, such as the Postal Service, are organizationally similar to private corporations except that the government owns them rather than stockholders. Foundations and institutes administer grant programs to local governments, universities, nonprofit institutions, and individuals for research in the natural and social sciences or to promote the arts. Independent regulatory commissions, such as the SEC, are agencies outside the major executive departments that are charged with the regulation of important aspects of the economy. Quasi-governmental companies, such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, are private, profit-seeking corporations created by Congress to serve a public purpose, such as increasing the availability of credit to home buyers.

***2. How have federal employee personnel policies evolved?*** The size of the federal civilian bureaucracy has grown dramatically since the early days of the nation. Today, 2.7 million people work for the federal government, with millions more working indirectly as private contractors, or employees paid by federal grant money. When Andrew Jackson was president, federal employees were hired primarily on the basis of their political connections. After Garfield’s assassination by a disappointed office seeker, Congress reformed the hiring process to emphasize merit. Congress subsequently established a Senior Executive Service (SES) of upper-level civil servants who would be eligible for big bonuses but could be more easily transferred, reassigned, etc.

***3. What are the steps in the rulemaking process?*** When Congress passes regulatory legislation, it frequently delegates authority to the bureaucracy to make legally binding rules to implement the legislation. Rules are sometimes the product of formal negotiations among government agencies and affected interest groups called regulatory negotiation. The OMB reviews rules before they go into effect. Congress can overturn rules before they go into effect through the legislative process subject to presidential veto and possible override.

***4. Who are the main political actors in bureaucratic policymaking, and how can they influence the process?*** Bureaucratic policymaking is a complex process involving the president, Congress, interest groups, and the bureaucracy itself. A president can have an impact on bureaucratic policymaking through appointive powers, the OMB, and his authority to propose budgets to Congress. Congress can abolish an agency, reorganize its structure, change its jurisdiction, cut its budget, audit its expenditures, investigate its performance, and overrule its decisions. Interest groups lobby agencies, lobby Congress, and sometimes file suits to influence administrative actions. Career bureaucrats have resources to defend their own interests, and find power in alliances with interest groups and key members of Congress.

Some political scientists believe that administrative policymaking reflects the activity of subgovernments or iron triangles, which are cozy, three-sided relationships among government agencies, interest groups, and key members of Congress in which all parties benefit. In recent years, however, many political scientists have concluded that the concept that best describes administrative policymaking is issue networks, which are groups of political actors that are concerned with some aspect of public policy.

**Tips for Success**

**Much of life is just showing up:** Go to class every day, show up on time, pay attention, and don’t leave early.

**Enjoy:** Find a way to enjoy every class you take because students do better in subjects they like.

**Key Terms**

**Cabinet Departments**

major administrative units of the federal government that have responsibility for the conduct of a wide range of government operations

**Captured Agencies**

agencies that work to benefit the economic interests they regulate rather than serving the public interest

**Cap and Trade**

an approach to pollution control in which the government sets a limit on the amount of emissions allowed (the cap) and then permits companies to buy and sell emissions allowances (the trade)

**Civil Service System**

a hiring system based on merit rather than political connections

**Collective Bargaining**

a negotiation between an employer and a union representing employees over the terms and conditions of employment

**Cost-Benefit Analysis**

an evaluation of a proposed policy or regulation based on a comparison of its expected benefits and anticipated costs

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

the federal agency responsible for enforcing the nation’s environmental laws

**Fire-Alarm Oversight**

an indirect system of congressional surveillance of bureaucratic administration characterized by rules, procedures, and informal practices that enable individual citizens and organized interest groups to examine administrative decisions, charge agencies with violating legislative goals, and seek remedies from agencies, courts, and Congress itself

**Global Warming**

the gradual warming of the Earth’s atmosphere, reportedly caused by the burning of fossil fuels and industrial pollutants

**Government Corporations**

corporations organizationally similar to private corporations, except that the government rather than stockholders owns them

**Hatch Act**

a measure designed to restrict the political activities of federal employees to voting and the private expression of views

**Independent Executive Agencies**

executive branch agencies that are not part of any of the 15 cabinet-level departments

**Independent Regulatory Commission**

an agency outside the major executive departments that is charged with the regulation of important aspects of the economy

**Inner Cabinet**

the secretary of state, secretary of defense, secretary of the treasury, and the attorney general

**Issue Network**

a group of political actors that is actively involved with policymaking in a particular issue area

**President’s Cabinet**

an advisory group created by the president that includes the department heads and other officials chosen by the president

**Quasi-Governmental Company**

a private, profit-seeking corporation created by Congress to serve a public purpose

**Regulatory Negotiation**

a process by which representatives of the interests that would be impacted by a rule work with government officials to negotiate the terms of the rule

**Rule**

a legally binding regulation

**Rulemaking**

the regulatory process used by government agencies to enact legally binding regulations

**Spoils System**

the method of hiring government employees from among the friends, relatives, and supporters of elected officeholders

**Subgovernment or Iron Triangle**

a cozy, three-sided relationship among government agencies, interest groups, and key members of Congress in which all parties benefit

**Discussion Questions**

1. How are cabinet departments organized? Who heads them, and how are the heads chosen? What is the cabinet’s policymaking role?

2. Why are federal employment practices controversial? How do the professional perspectives of government employees affect administrative policymaking?

3. What is rulemaking? What role do the OMB and federal courts play in the rulemaking process?

4. What tools does the president have to influence the implementation of federal programs? What tools does Congress have for influencing the implementation of federal programs?

5. What is a captured agency? Are most federal agencies captured agencies? Do think captured agencies are problematic in a democracy?

**Interactive Activity**

**Comparative: Comparing Bureaucracies**

For many people in the United States and elsewhere, "bureaucracy" is a bad word, conjuring up visions of long lines at the Motor Vehicle Department and confusing tax forms. Bureaucracy's true meaning is the particular way of organizing large and complex societies, one that stresses competence, division of labor, and clearly defined authority relations. In the past, bureaucracies in most countries, including the United States, were built on patronage or the spoils system. But today, many countries enjoy a merit-based civil service system. How does the U.S. bureaucracy compare to others? Is it as large or effective as those in other countries? In this activity, you will compare bureaucracies in the United States with those in six other countries. In the process, you will learn how different countries build their bureaucracies, how they select the members of their bureaucratic systems, and the challenges each country faces in comparison to those faced by the United States. You will also evaluate different bureaucracies in terms of relative size, effectiveness, and corruption issues.

[View Comparative Activity](http://www.ablongman.com/cmsredirects/long_mypoliscilab_2009/comp.comparingbureaucracies.html)

**“Talking About American Government” Podcasts**

Author Neal Tannahill discusses the most important concepts in this chapter

* [Cap and Trade](http://pearsonpodcasting.pearsoncmg.com/playlists/think-american-government-neal-tannahill/episodes/cap-and-trade#podcast-2)